

NO HOME ON RANGE

Gap's plan to acquire land draws opposition

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BY AL WINN

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FORT INDIANTOWN GAP • The man who helped knock the wheels off a proposed Wild West Museum in Harrisburg is joining forces with a group opposed to a proposed land swap involving the Pennsylvania National Guard, Pennsylvania Game Commission and the Harrisburg Authority.

Jason Smith, a Harrisburg advertising man and founder of "Citizens for a Better Harrisburg," said the estimated \$3 million the authority would get for selling more than 2,000 acres of land upstream from the DeHart Reservoir would be wasted.

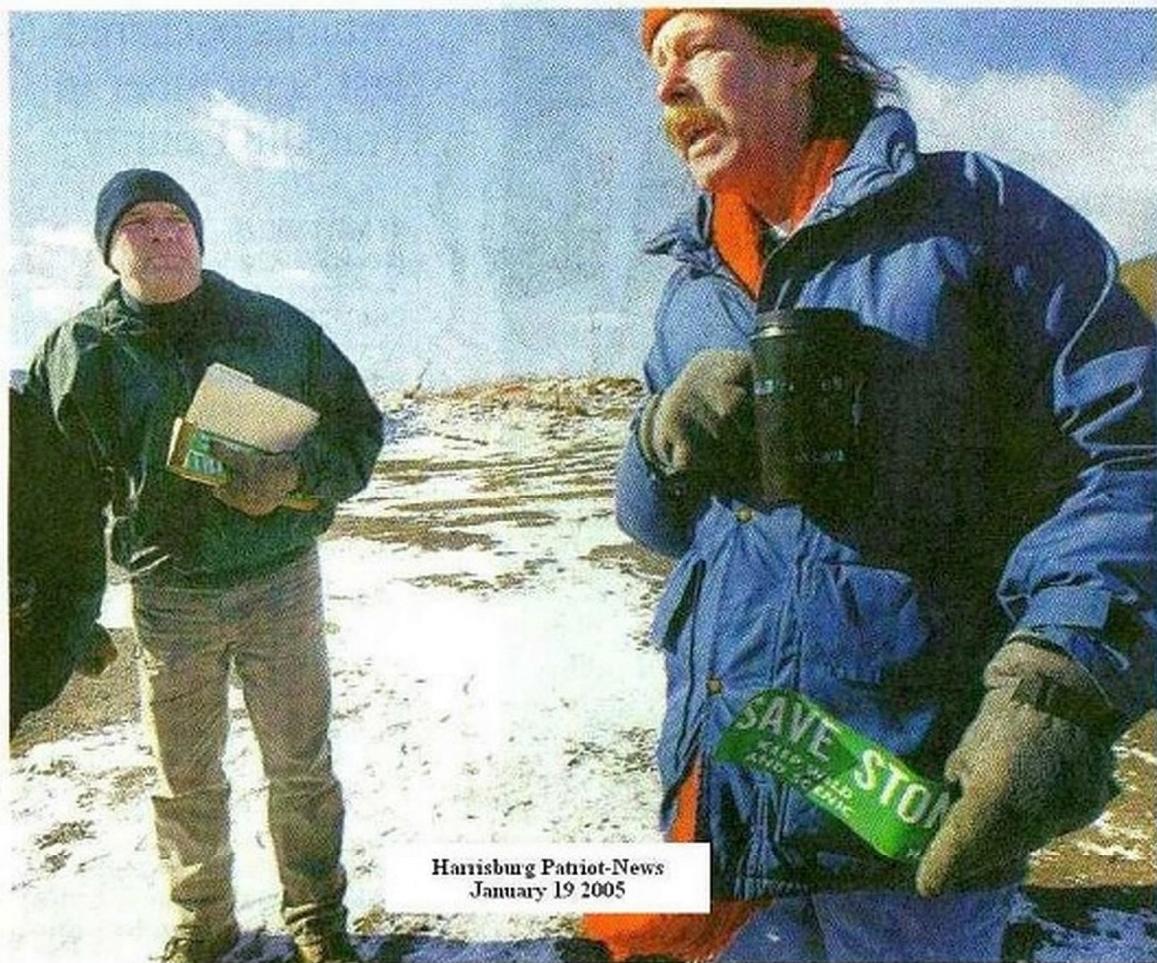
Mayor Stephen R. Reed would get the money, Smith said, "so he can be paid for his pet projects."

Calls yesterday to Reed spokesman Randy King seeking comment were not returned.

Reed gave up on the National Museum of the Old West last year amid criticism of the proposed home for \$4.5 million of Western artifacts he acquired using money from a city agency.

Public opposition included a broadside by Smith, who launched a Web site — www.wildwestmuseum.org — that blasted the project.

Under the proposed deal, the National Guard would transfer the land to be purchased from the authority to the Game Commission in exchange for 2,100 acres the commission owns on the north side of Second Moun-



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Dale Ibberson, right, says he is concerned that tanks might run up and down Stony Creek if a land swap at Fort Indiantown Gap goes through. Jim Rice listens.

tain. The National Guard has said it needs that land as a buffer for a firing range it is building on the south side of the mountain.

The Game Commission must now decide whether to approve the deal. The issue is not on the agenda of the commission's meeting next week, but several opponents said they would attend the meeting's public comment period Sunday afternoon.

Opponents, most of whom attended public meetings held by the National Guard in May and September, said they were forming a coalition.

What most are opposed to is the transfer of land on the north side of Second Mountain to the National Guard.

That was the reason about

two dozen deal opponents, including Smith, braved below-zero wind chills yesterday to stand in the 480-acre clear-cut area the Guard would like to use to train tank gunners.

The area, containing little more than stumps, could represent the future of the mountain's north side, land-swap opponents said.

"I guarantee you, if [the land swap] goes through, this is what the north side will look like in five years," said Larry Herr of Union Twp., Lebanon County.

Dale Ibberson agreed. "My fear is, if they take the land, there would be tanks running up and down [Stony] Creek," he said.

The National Guard has said nothing of the sort

would happen. "The land exchange will not result in any change to the portion of State Game Land 211," said a letter from state Adjutant Gen. Jessica Wright to Vernon Ross, Game Commission executive director.

Wright said the National Guard is prepared to put in writing that it won't build roads in the area.

The land that would be transferred to the Guard would not include Stony Creek, although the northern boundary would run 50 meters south of the stream.

The land the Guard wants runs about seven miles from Cold Spring Road west to Middle Paxton Twp.

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